



MEMORIAL

OF THE

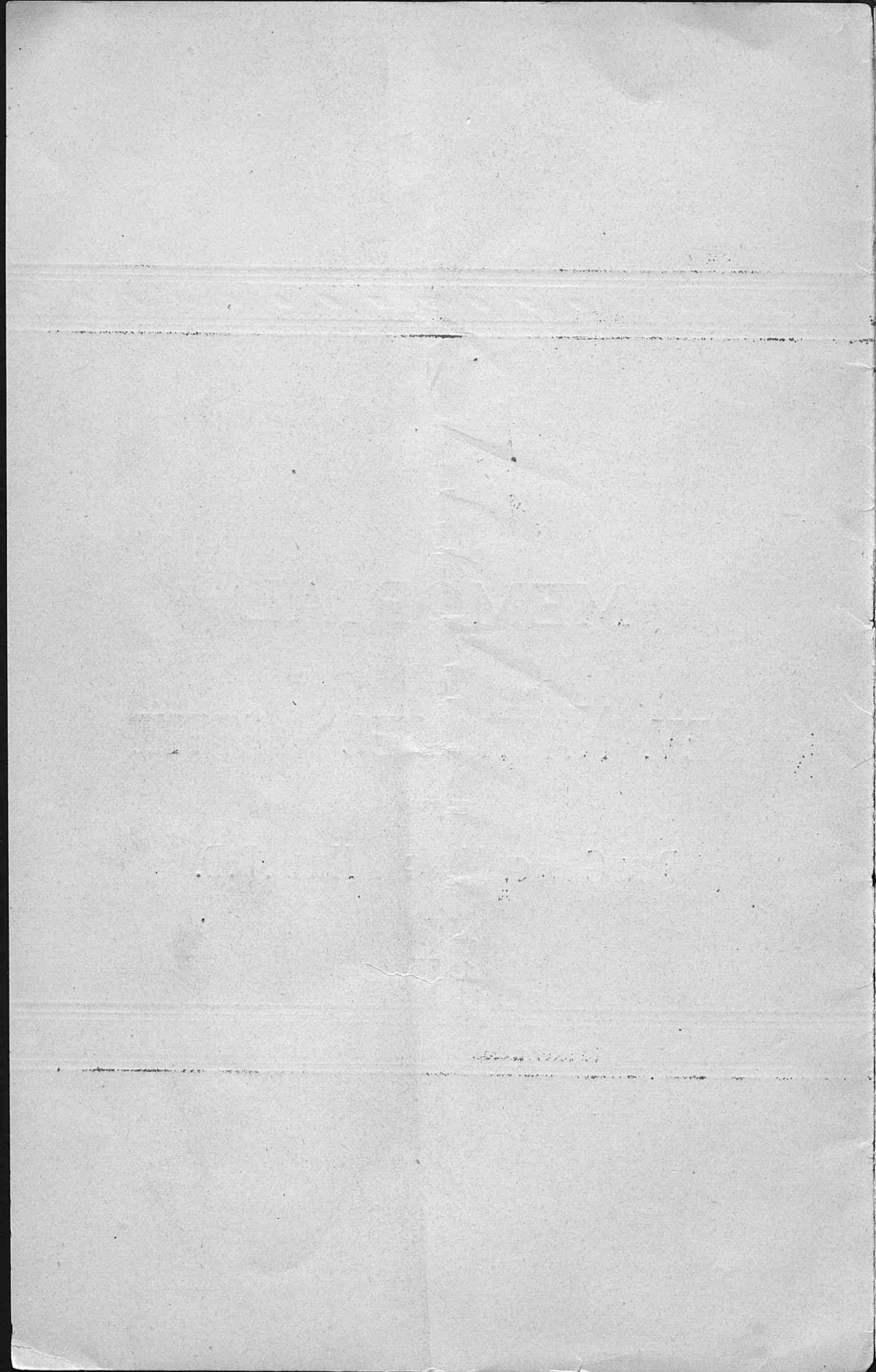
REV. NATHANIEL PETTIT,

BY THE

REV. GEORGE MORGAN HILLS, D.D.



1885.



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628  
A SERMON

COMMEMORATIVE OF THE LATE

REV. NATHANIEL PETTIT,

President of the Standing Committee of the  
Diocese of New Jersey,

Preached in Christ Church, Bordentown, N. J.,

ON

WEDNESDAY IN THE OCTAVE OF ALL SAINTS,

NOVEMBER 4, 1885,

BY THE

REV. GEORGE MORGAN HILLS, D. D.,  
DEAN OF BURLINGTON.

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Published by request of the Vestry and the Clergy in attendance.

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O happy servant he  
In such a posture found ;  
He shall his Lord with rapture see,  
And be with honor crown'd.

—Hymn 171.



## SERMON.

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*Blessed are those servants, whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them. And if he shall come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants.*—ST. LUKE XII.: 37, 38.

No words seem more applicable for this occasion. We have assembled, in this octave of All Saints', from all parts of the diocese, from many other parts of the State, and some from even greater distances, to offer, with the parishioners and citizens of Bordentown, before the altar of God, our united praise and thanksgivings, for the good example of one of His servants, whom we have known and loved; a priest who has finished his course in faith and now rests from his labors; a priest whom we honored on earth, and, we doubt not, the King of saints welcomes in paradise.

Nathaniel Pettit, son of John and Phœbe (Nixon) Pettit, first saw the light of day in Newton, Sussex county, N. J., in the year of grace 1825, December 21st, the feast of the Apostle St. Thomas—and like him, was a twin.

We hear of him next at Port Colden, eight miles from Schooley's Mountain, N. J., a student in St. Matthew's Hall, conducted by that dear old man, the late Rev. Peter L. Jaques, as its prospectus reads, "for the education of young gentlemen on Christian principles." This was in 1844-5.

In 1849 he was graduated at the General Theological Seminary in the city of New York, and the same summer admitted to the office of a deacon by the Rt. Rev. George W. Doane, in

St. Mary's Church, Burlington, N. J., and at once began work at three missionary stations in Warren county. A year later, June 2d, 1850, in the same church where he entered the diaconate, and by the same prelate, he was advanced to the priesthood. From 1850 till 1866 he was first, assistant, then rector of Christ Church, Newton, N. J., and for the two years following acted as Superintendent of Public Instruction in Sussex county, which position he resigned in 1868, in order to become rector of this parish, Christ Church, Bordentown. His whole life, therefore, was passed in his native state, and more remarkable yet in these days of unrest, all his ministry of six and thirty years in only two parishes.

While at Newton, in 1860, he was brought to special notice by being the preacher at the first convention over which Bishop Odenheimer presided. That appointment rested with the Bishop, and it was his testimony to Mr. Pettit's worth. This was five and twenty years ago, remember, when our departed brother was accounted a young man, and there were more than an hundred clergy connected with the diocese. And his selection to this function at that time becomes still more significant, when we reflect that party lines were then severely drawn, and "discord among brethren" was rife. God be praised that those unseemly strifes have long since ceased! The preacher at such a time must have discretion, to say something worth saying and yet give no offence. That Mr. Pettit accomplished this is evident. His theme was "The Building of God's Spiritual House, the Work of Ministers and People." The young preacher looked about him and saw fifty-eight clergy and seventy-two lay deputies assembled at a new epoch with a new Bishop, and his text, at its first utterance, must have riveted attention: "Yet now be strong, O Zerubbabel, saith the Lord; and be strong, O Joshua, son of Josedech, the high priest; and be strong, all ye people of the land, saith the Lord, and work: for I am with you, saith the Lord of hosts." Haggai ii. 4. WORK was the seed-thought of the discourse. Work, not brooding over the past; work amidst discouragements, yet work full of promise. Work, for bishop, and clergy, and laity—all the *people* as well as pastors, and Josedech, the high priest. The topic unfolded so as he went on; it

budded, it blossomed, and its blossoms were so fragrant, that the discourse was "published by request"—a compliment only now and then paid to a convention sermon. And that sermon "still brings forth fruit, and its fruit shall remain."

When the diocese of Northern New Jersey was set up, and New Jersey left without an episcopal head—Bishop Odenheimer electing the new jurisdiction—the most highly-honored man at the Special Convention, November 12th, 1874, was the Rev. Mr. Pettit, because he was the celebrant of the opening Eucharist. And at the business session, when we were "to set in order the things that were wanting," and officers of collectedness and endurance were required for the prolonged excitement certain to attend so grave a matter as the election of a bishop, he was appointed Assistant Secretary. I can almost hear him now, calling the roll of lay-deputies, calmly and patiently, for two full days. And, not three months afterwards, when our present Diocesan was consecrated, Mr. Pettit was again honored by being one of the two attendant-presbyters of the Bishop-elect.

At the Annual Convention in the succeeding May, he was elected a member of the Standing Committee, and eventually elevated to its Presidency. He had been a Trustee of the General Theological Seminary since 1869, and was a member of the Board of Domestic and Foreign Missions while those bodies retained their former management. To these offices were added later those of Examining Chaplain, Secretary of the Convocation of Burlington and *ex officio* one of its Executive Committee, and a Trustee of Burlington College, the corporation in charge not merely of the College proper, but of the extensive interests of "Riverside" and St. Mary's Hall. Besides, he was at the time of his demise, by canonical residence the Senior Presbyterian of the diocese, having the *prestige* and experience which such a place brings.

A priest like this is missed everywhere in the diocese. It seems at first as though little could be done without him; always at his post, punctually, conscientiously, giving his best attention and his uncommon intelligence to the work in hand.



Calm, dignified, unassuming, courteous, with few words, and those wise, and weighty, and always to the point.

His last widely-known literary effort was that at the late Centennial at New Brunswick. It was written, I am told, in the night, on the eve of that convention, when "his sleep went from him." He had no thought of his verses being known, much less of being read on that occasion; least of all, of their being perpetuated in the memorial of those proceedings. But the Bishop saw them, and insisted upon their being a part of the afternoon exercises, and they were so well received that among his clerical peers he was playfully called "poet-laureate of the diocese." Criticism is disarmed when we know that he made no claim to poetical gifts, and when the lines show so clearly the sweetness and devoutness of his heart. He had a genial nature and an equable disposition, seldom elated, seldom depressed, though long disciplined with domestic afflictions.

He was unusually well read. He had opinions maturely formed on social, literary and political, as well as ecclesiastical questions, and they were deep and broad. No one could be with him in any examination-room, whether it were that of children or youth, or candidates for orders, without perceiving his knowledge, although it appeared indirectly, as an examiner rather than as an instructor. He had no academic degrees, earned or honorary, but there is none that knew him well, who will not say that he deserved both. For seldom in a crown of presbyters is found a better scholar. Studious always, he was abreast of the times in "rightly dividing the word of God." If called upon to range his theological teaching and practice under some American divine, I should say Bishop Hobart, the aroma of whose works pervaded the Church through Mr. Pettit's early years, and after whom he named a son. With his own three bishops, Doane, Odenheimer and Scarborough, he was always in accord, never distrustful of what they did or taught, and he always "submitted himself to their godly judgments." Such a man, as we might suppose, enjoyed the respect and good will of all, without regard to class or sect.

The life-work of the parish priest is superficially known even by most church-people. The world knows nothing of



it, and commonly misjudges it. But to one who, as the ordinal exhorts, "applies himself solely to this one thing, and draws all his cares and studies this way," every hour is filled with work, and every work is filled with interest. There is heroism in it, and he knows it. Sermons, not essays, but messages from God, to prepare; children to catechise; a Sunday School to supervise; classes for confirmation to instruct; parochial guilds to guide; prayer, in public, in families, by sick beds, in private, to offer; eucharists to celebrate; besides, what cannot go into the parish register or a parochial report, "labor and travail, night and day," reproof, rebuke, encouragement and consolation, with individuals, which will only be known at the last great day. Oh, what volumes will be opened to the praise of those who have been "instant in season, out of season!"

Brethren of the parish of Bordentown, the character and deeds of your late rector are full of sweet and sacred memories!

A year before he came to you a small sum had been set apart as the nucleus for a new church fabric. Under his advice this grew. It was so skillfully invested that in eleven years this building was consecrated. Free from debt, with chapel, Sunday school-room, choir-room and all their appointments, this handsome stone church, which has, for the outlay, no superior in the diocese, is virtually a monument to Mr. Pettit. "He is worthy," said the people of Capernaum, "for he loveth our nation and hath built us a synagogue." No less can be said of him who directed the building of this house of prayer.

His long rectorship of seventeen years, you will bear me witness, continually increased in usefulness, and in your reciprocal affection. His influence spread and deepened in your hearts like roots in the soil, till suddenly that strong form swayed, suddenly it bent, suddenly, in his own home, in his own parlor, in the arms of his son and daughter, early Monday morning, July 27th, suddenly "he was not, for God took him." All his life he had prayed like us to be delivered from "sudden death." And the suffrage was not denied, for we know that this word "sudden" in the litany means "unprepared for." No devout churchman regards momentary disembodiment as a thing to be deprecated

except for one spiritually asleep. "*Blessed* are those servants, whom the Lord when he cometh shall find watching."

Brethren of the clergy, when we each one rose from our knees with the commission of a deacon, our first utterance by authority was those stirring words in the gospel, "Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning; and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding; that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately. Blessed are those servants, whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching." We believe our dear brother, from that hour till his last, kept this charge in mind. Watching, we know he was—watching against sin, watching to please God, watching unto prayer, watching for the souls committed to his charge. And we believe assuredly that he is now receiving that reward which is portrayed by the Lord's "coming forth and girding himself and making us to sit down to meat and serving us."

Bishop, clergy, laity! life grows grander to us the more it is spiritually discerned. The invisible, with whom we are "knit together;" the Saviour in His sacrament; the company of angels; the transfigured saints; the militant, the expectant hosts! Here they unite, "in one communion and fellowship." Here, where our brother so often was "talking with" Christ; here, where we saw him and heard him in this heavenly converse, when—"suddenly, as we look round about, we see no man any more save JESUS only, with ourselves."

## ACTION OF THE VESTRY.

At a meeting of the Vestry of Christ Church, Bordentown, N. J., held on Monday evening, July 27th, 1885, the following preamble and resolutions were adopted :

WHEREAS, Almighty God, in His infinite wisdom, having suddenly removed from among us by death, our beloved rector, Rev. Nathaniel Pettit, we, the vestry of Christ Church, desiring to record our high appreciation of his eminent Christian character, and devotion to the Church through seventeen years of faithful service, and to express our sympathy with his bereaved family ; therefore, be it

*Resolved*, First—That we recognize in him a man whose intellectual endowments, beauty of character, moral worth and earnestness of purpose, eminently fitted him for his life-work. He was an able spiritual adviser, an affectionate, steadfast friend, and a safe counsellor. His teachings were marked by a broad liberality of spirit, which won the admiration of all. His manly virtues and Christian character gave great strength to the cause of Christianity, for the success of which he so diligently labored.

Second—That by his death the Church has sustained a grievous loss, inasmuch as her prosperity, both temporal and spiritual, is mainly due to his untiring efforts ; and that we will ever hold his memory sacred as a bright example of noble qualities, in the Master's work.

Third—That a copy of these resolutions be presented in the family with our sympathy, and prayers that He who "healeth those that are broken in heart and bindeth up their wounds," may comfort and sustain them in this hour of affliction.

JOHN W. MCKNIGHT,

LEWIS P. THOMPSON,

WILLIAM MACFARLAND,

*Committee.*



## MINUTE

READ BY THE REV. ELVIN K. SMITH, AND ADOPTED BY THE CLERGY  
AT THE REV. MR. PETTIT'S FUNERAL.

A course of quiet, earnest and resolute usefulness in the Church below has been suddenly terminated, and God has taken to His rest in Paradise our well-beloved brother, Nathaniel Pettit.

Ordered Deacon less than thirty-six years ago, Mr. Pettit had yet been, since 1882, the Senior Presbyterian of the Diocese in which all his life was spent.

The Bishop of New Jersey, reporting to the Convention of 1850 the ordination of the young deacon, added the statement that he "immediately repaired to his post as missionary for Warren county, to officiate in three vacant parishes."

That first step in his ministry was consonant with all that followed. He went about his every assigned duty *immediately* and stood firm, as to a *post* of duty, wherever God's providence placed him.

His earlier mission stations, and the two parishes of Christ Church, Newton, and Christ Church, Bordentown, were the few localities of his clerical life. Not given to change, he built the better, as he stayed the longer; and the stable strength of his parishes resulted, under God, from his own stability.

His studies and his convictions were all in the line of sound Anglican theology; and in his practice he exhibited the harmony of doctrinal conservatism with the progressive spirit of the Church's life.

In the responsible positions of Examining Chaplain and President of the Standing Committee, he fulfilled the expectations of his Bishop and his brethren, who now lament the loss of his counsels, his example and his loving companionship.

Mr. Pettit exemplified a type of Christian and clerical character that was more familiar to a former generation than to our own—simple, unaffected, manly, almost rugged, but so adorned with kindness that the ruggedness was attractive and pleasing, as the oak that gives loving shelter to the soft mosses and the clinging vines.

Called to bear such burdens of sorrow and care as God lays not often on His servants, our brother bore them with a serenity and cheerfulness that seemed most remote from suffering, and stamped him one of those happiest of men, to whom chastisement is joy.

We, his clerical brethren, gathered here with his Bishop, his parishioners and his bereaved family, to lay to rest all that is mortal of our dear friend and brother, bless God for the good example of his servant departed, and pray that grace may be given us to follow him in those things wherein he followed Christ; and that we, with him, may attain the peace of Paradise and the bliss that is beyond.

